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Reports from the Field : Mahale, Tanzania : The Death of Ntologi, The Unparalleled Leader of M Group [4]

AUTHOR(S):

Nishida, Toshisada

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MAHALE, TANZANIA

Ed.note: The fall of Ntologi from alpha status was reported in the last issue (PAN, 2(2): 9-11). This historic figure, as it were, came to the end of his long life unexpectedly and in a very unusual manner. Professor T. Nishida, who was at

Kansyana Research Station at the time reports on Ntologi's death for this issue.

The Death of Ntologi, The Unparalleled Leader of M Group

*Toshisada Nishida
Kyoto University*

Ntologi was found in the bush 1 km south of Kansyana Camp on the 14th of November, 1995, on the brink of death. On that day two researchers, Noriko Itoh and Hamisi Bunengwa, had been in search of M Group chimpanzees since morning when they finally heard calls in the distance. When they arrived at the site from which the calls originated, Ntologi was lying on his side on the ground, with his eyes closed. Hamisi immediately ran to the camp and notified me.

I set off and fifteen minutes later found Ntologi. He was still breathing but did not move, even when surrounded by humans. He bore wounds on many parts of his body including his wrist, the thumbs of both hands, his right arm, back, head and lower lip.

There were a few chimpanzees watching us from the trees above. They included Gwekulo, an adult female, and Nick, an adolescent male. There was also an adult male, Aji, nearby, who occasionally charged Ntologi, apparently wanting to kick or slap him, and I stopped him from doing this. Sometimes Ntologi trembled, his body shuddering roughly with each noisy inhalation, but he never once opened his eyes.

We realized he was seriously injured and would be an easy victim for a leopard if left where he was, so I decided to carry him to our camp. I asked my assistants to make a stretcher, and two long poles, three large sisal bags and ropes were brought from camp. I pushed Ntologi onto the

stretcher and he was settled on it as gently as possible.

When we tried to carry him away, Aji once again attacked and I was forced to intervene to prevent him from harming his former leader. When we finally began to head towards camp, the chimpanzees began to emit "fear calls" and continued to do so for at least four minutes (as everyone was consumed by the task at hand, no one checked to see how long the calls continued). For me it sounded as if the chimpanzees were mourning.

We laid Ntologi in one of the rooms of "New Kuape House", the guest house for researchers. We put a generous amount of grass and herbs under the stretcher so that Ntologi would feel comfortable. We sent one of our staff to the Tanzania National Park office at Bilenge with a message to headquarters in Arusha, begging for a veterinarian to come to Mahale by plane. Unfortunately, this could not be realized. In the evening Ntologi's breathing became intermittent and I pushed on his chest, trying to assist him. Around 8:00 p.m. he recovered somewhat. I checked his condition every half hour until 11:30, and he appeared stable. I began hoping that he would make it through the night.

At 3:30 a.m., my wife awakened me saying that she couldn't hear Ntologi's breathing anymore. We immediately rushed to his room where we found him, still and warm. I attempted to revive him, but it was to no avail. He was about forty years old at the time of his death.

P.S. The next morning, Mike Huffman, Noriko, my wife and I weighed Ntologi's body and found him to be only 38.5 kg. Evidently he had lost a lot of water overnight because the previous afternoon we thought perhaps he weighed about 42 kg. This was an incredible loss overall considering that I estimated he weighed 60 kg during his heyday.



Left: Ntologi leading his ally, Kalunde and an adolescent male, Alofu (18 Sep., 1992; Photo by T. Nishida)